Liberal Arts Education for Whole Person Cultivation: A Case Study of Three Universities in East Asia

Background 1) How to best prepare students for social challenges and uncertainties in the 21st century; 2) A pressing need to educate students as socially responsible citizens during the COVID 19 pandemic. 3) Liberal arts education (LAE) goals to meet challenges: nurturing innovation, critical thinking, and lifelong learning, and its value for social responsibility and citizenship cultivation.

LAE in the West and Asia: 1) Rooted in Greco-Roman philosophy, focusing on cultivating the whole person as a wise citizen in undergraduate level; 2) Characterized by LAE model: broad curriculum; small-class teaching, mentorship, residential experience, extra-curricular and community-based activities (Godwin & Pickus, 2017; Jung et al., 2019; Nishimura & Sasao, 2019). 3) LAE in non-Western societies decoupled from American Model (Boyle, 2020) 4) LAE in former Christian universities before 1950s (Mou, 2020), Challenges of LAE/ General education implementation in comprehensive research universities in Chinese contexts, Gap in research on tradition and comparative study.

Research Question: How does LAE models in three universities in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan contribute to cultivating whole persons with capabilities for their societies?

Three case institutions: Yuepei College at Peking University in mainland China; Lingnan University in Hong Kong; Tunghai University in Taiwan.

Theoretical Framework: 1) Capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2001, 2009; Sen, 1999) with a broader conception of wellbeing and human flourishing 2) LAE purposes/outcomes for substantive freedom to be and do (capabilities) and achieved forms of being and doing we have reason to value (Spreficco, 2013): Training broad knowledge, Developing the power of mind, Fostering moral and civil character, Cultivating social responsibility (Chopp, 2014; Ferrall, 2011; Jung et al., 2016)
Methodology & Research Design: 1) Mixed-methods (document, interview, survey) 2) Three stages: document analysis (curriculum, missions & goals, university newsletter); interview with admin & faculty members, students & alumni (N=31); online survey with alumni & students (N=42) Note: interview and survey from Lingnan and Tunghai; Yuanpei only documents

Findings: LAE in the three institutions 1) whole person focused, emphasizing social responsibility; 2) historical connection, LAE reform in the past two decades, social context influence; 3) analytical skills, diversification perspective, flexibility, preparation for uncertainty, a sense of social responsibilities; 4) analytical skills, diversification perspective, flexibility, preparation for uncertainty, a sense of social responsibilities; 5) Significant positive association between LAE modules and capabilities development.6) faculty member balancing workload of research and teaching; ranking / research - status - recruiting students; resources
Discussion & Conclusion: Common model + internationalization / global perspective; 2) Different approaches: Lingnan v.s Tunghai: "modified" LAE model, restoring LAE with small-scale experiment; 3) LAE in Chinese contexts: the meaning of 'person' in Chinese tradition and contexts, social responsibility, emphasis on whole person aligning with capabilities

Implication & Limitation: 1) Mission and goals of higher education broadly; 2) Role of colleges and universities in nurturing citizens and promoting diversity and inclusion in the current society; 3) Survey: small sample; valid can be enhanced, representative and large sample; 4) Future direction: longitudinal study, multiple-case study in different social contexts

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